A Global Research Agenda for Children with Disabilities

UNICEF INNOCENTI – GLOBAL OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND FORESIGHT

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Executive summary

Children with disabilities remain under-researched and underserved globally. Despite commitments to removing barriers to inclusion, the evidence base for effective policies, programmes and investments remains fragmented. The Global Research Agenda for Children with Disabilities (the Research Agenda) provides a strategic framework to close evidence gaps, drive disability-inclusive research, and ensure the meaningful engagement of children with disabilities and their representative organizations.

The Research Agenda guides evidence generation, identifies research gaps and promotes participatory methodologies, aligning with global frameworks like the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) and the UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy.

Stakeholders – including children and youth with disabilities, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), researchers, policymakers and donors – identified the following **priority research areas** through a **Disability Research Prioritization Exercise:**

1. **Violence prevention and protection from harm:** Children with disabilities face heightened risks of abuse, neglect and exploitation. More robust research is needed to inform protection strategies.
2. **Social protection and economic inclusion:** Families often struggle with the additional expenses of disability. Research must inform policies that support financial security and accessibility.
3. **Strengthening OPDs for advocacy:** OPDs need greater capacity and resources to amplify the voices of children with disabilities and drive meaningful policy change.
4. **Inclusive education:** Identifying scalable, cost-effective approaches is critical for improving enrolment, retention and learning outcomes, especially in low-resource settings.
5. **Early identification and intervention:** Detecting developmental delays and disabilities early ensures that children receive timely support, preventing barriers to education and inclusion.

To achieve meaningful progress, the Research Agenda is structured around **five strategic goals:**

1. **Address knowledge gaps:** Strengthen evidence-based decision-making by closing key research gaps.
2. **Bring visibility and foster collaboration:** Enhance global coordination and partnerships among researchers, policymakers and OPDs.
3. **Mainstream disability in all research:** Ensure that disability is systematically integrated into all child-focused research.
4. **Provide evidence for investment:** Build a strong investment case for disability-inclusive policies and programmes.
5. **Provide a platform to convene and call to action:** Establish dedicated spaces for knowledge sharing, advocacy and policy engagement.

Our call to action

The Research Agenda provides a clear, structured and action-driven pathway for strengthening evidence, guiding policy and driving investment. However, without dedicated funding, institutional commitment and long-term partnerships, research efforts will fail to create meaningful impact.

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CHAPTER 1

What is the Research Agenda?

The Global Research Agenda for Children with Disabilities (the Research Agenda) is a strategic framework that identifies priority research areas – defined through a global research prioritization exercise – to close critical evidence gaps, inform inclusive policies and programmes, and guide effective investments that support children with disabilities.

It outlines an implementation strategy to bridge the gap between research and practical, policy-relevant and programmatic outcomes. The Research Agenda offers a structured approach to evidence-based decision-making, ensuring that children with disabilities and their representative organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) are meaningfully engaged at global, regional and national levels.

The Research Agenda also plays a key role in advancing the objectives of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) *(see Annex 2)*, as well as agency-specific frameworks such as the UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS).

By guiding the generation of robust evidence, identifying key research gaps, and promoting inclusive and participatory methodologies, the Research Agenda strengthens the capacity of donors, researchers and decision-makers – including UNICEF, its partners and other agencies – to embed disability inclusion across policies, programmes and evidence initiatives, including data, research and evaluation.

1.1 Key goals

A defining objective of the Research Agenda is to ensure that children with disabilities have a voice in shaping research. This goes beyond participation – it is about co-creating knowledge, with the children engaging through their representative organizations in identifying priorities, shaping relevant research and influencing how findings are applied. The broad vision of the Research Agenda is as follows:

***Vision statement:** To establish a global research agenda that drives investment in effective, evidence-based interventions, ensuring the inclusion and rights of children with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries, across both development and humanitarian contexts.*

The Research Agenda has five goals:

1. **Close evidence gaps:** Address the lack of data and research on what works for children with disabilities in education, child protection, social protection and participation.
2. **Mainstream disability in research:** Ensure disability is systematically integrated into all child-focused research, rather than being treated as a separate issue.
3. **Support targeted disability research:** Conduct in-depth studies to understand and dismantle specific barriers faced by children with disabilities.
4. **Strengthen inclusive research methods:** Ensure participatory, accessible and ethically sound research practices that engage children and youth with disabilities directly.
5. **Enhance research uptake for policy change:** Translate findings into actionable policies and investments to improve the lives of children with disabilities.

CHAPTER 2

Why research matters

Children with disabilities remain among the most under-researched and underserved populations globally. Despite commitments to inclusion, significant evidence gaps persist,[1] leading to ineffective policies, underfunded interventions and systemic barriers to participation. Without robust research, disability remains invisible in decision-making, denying millions of children access to education, healthcare, social protection and full participation in society.

In 1998, James Charlton argued that people with disabilities must shape the decisions, policies and services that impact their lives. This applies equally to research. Yet, despite decades of advocacy, children and youth with disabilities remain excluded from agenda-setting, research design and evidence generation. With an estimated 240 million children with disabilities worldwide, their absence from national statistics and global monitoring frameworks limits governments, donors and development organizations from taking informed, effective action.

Without a strong research foundation, disability-inclusive policies and programmes risk being:

- **underfunded** – because the scale of need is underestimated;
- **ineffective** – because interventions are not tailored to real challenges; and
- **overlooked** – because children with disabilities remain absent from key data systems.

Research must lead to impact.[2] The Research Agenda was developed to address these challenges. It provides a structured, evidence-driven road map to:

- **drive policy change** by ensuring disability is embedded in national and global research agendas;
- **increase effective investment** in inclusive programmes by demonstrating where funding is most needed; and
- **accelerate inclusion** by identifying and prioritizing research that leads to tangible improvements in children's lives.

2.1 "Research without us is not about us"

For decades, research on children with disabilities has been conducted about them, rather than with them – that is, too often, research priorities are determined only by external actors – governments, institutions and researchers – without meaningful engagement from children and youth with disabilities, their families or their representative organizations.

The Research Agenda sets a new course, calling for children and youth with disabilities not only to be participants but to be engaged in the creation of the research, policies and programmes that shape their lives. The Research Agenda is built on the principle that research must be inclusive from the start – with priorities, methodologies and outcomes guided by those with lived experience.

Many studies have sought input from children (and adults) with disabilities; however, true participation goes beyond consultation. Research outputs must amplify the voice of children with disabilities.

Therefore, children and youth with disabilities must have age-appropriate opportunities to be involved across the research process, including contributing to setting research agendas, collecting data, co-authoring articles and studies, and being part of guiding how findings are applied in policy and practice.

The Research Agenda and associated Disability Research Prioritization Exercise (DRPE)[3] were designed with that participatory principle in mind. Through a participatory process involving 170 stakeholders – including OPDs, researchers and, most importantly, children and youth with disabilities – this agenda was shaped by those who know the issues best.

This is a shift from research about disability to research that is shaped by persons with disabilities. It ensures that the knowledge produced is credible, actionable and rooted in real experiences.

2.2 Turning evidence into action

Research must inform direct action and serve to place the issues and solutions facing families and children with disabilities directly on the desks of governments and decision-makers. By amplifying both the voices of children and the perspectives of their families, research can drive policy and investment that responds to real needs, ensuring that disability inclusion is not just a stated commitment but a tangible reality. This also means that governments, donors and research institutions must commit to funding and implementing research that centres the voices of children with disabilities and includes strategies for the adoption of research findings.

The Research Agenda provides a clear road map for generating evidence that can drive meaningful change – but without investment in participatory research and uptake strategies, these efforts will fall short.

CHAPTER 3

Framing the Research Agenda

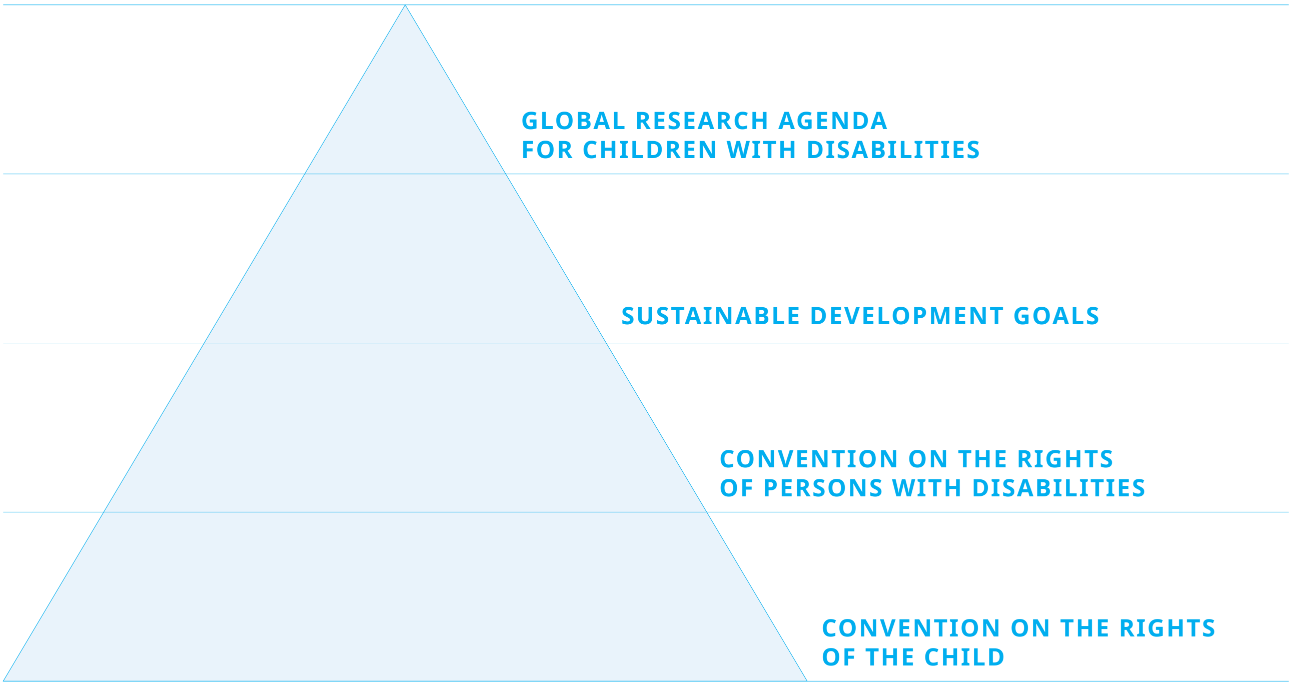
This Research Agenda is driven by a vision in which all children, including those with disabilities, live in barrier-free and inclusive communities. It is anchored in key international frameworks that recognize disability inclusion as a fundamental human right and a critical component of sustainable development.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide the overarching framework for global action, reinforcing the commitment to leaving no one behind. Disability inclusion is embedded across multiple targets, ensuring that progress towards the 2030 Agenda is equitable and inclusive. In parallel, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities frame disability as a social issue requiring systemic change rather than a medical condition to be treated.

The Research Agenda shifts the focus away from predominantly medicalized approaches towards a social model of disability that recognizes children with disabilities as rights holders. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities calls for research that advances inclusive policies, dismantles barriers and fosters the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in society. It also explicitly obligates States Parties to carry out disability-focused research, generate disaggregated data and invest in evidence-based policies that promote inclusion. Similarly, the CRC Committee has urged governments to prioritize disability-related research and monitoring.

By grounding the Research Agenda in these global frameworks and commitments, we ensure that research does not merely study disability but actively contributes to dismantling barriers, promoting participation and driving systemic change.

Figure 1: Framing the Global Research Agenda



CHAPTER 4

The priority research questions

4.1 Why prioritizing research matters

Here we return to the vision statement for the Research Agenda – that is, to guide investment in effective interventions that support the rights of children with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), in both development and humanitarian settings. To realize this vision, research must be targeted, strategic and aligned with the most pressing needs of children with disabilities and their families.

Without clear research priorities, our limited resources risk being spread thinly across fragmented studies and targeting the wrong things, limiting their impact on policy and practice.

Prioritization also enables donors, foundations, state donors and philanthropists to allocate funding more strategically. Rather than dispersing resources across isolated or small-scale studies, prioritizing research questions ensures that funding is concentrated on generating evidence that directly informs policy and programming for the greatest impact. This not only strengthens accountability in disability-inclusive development but also ensures that resources are used cost-effectively and aligned with the most urgent needs identified by stakeholders.

This section outlines the approach UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight took, as part of a comprehensive Disability Research Prioritization Exercise (DRPE), to reach consensus on the research priorities summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Priority research questions

RQ1	**PROTECTION AND PREVENTION**	What are effective models of prevention and protection for children with disabilities from violence and abuse within their communities, schools and institutions, including peer violence?
RQ2	**PROTECTION AND PREVENTION**	How can we effectively prevent and protect children with disabilities from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and abandonment by their families and caregivers?
RQ3	**SOCIAL PROTECTION AND ECONOMIC INCLUSION**	What social protection interventions effectively relieve families of disability-related expenses and ensure access to affordable support services and devices?
RQ4	**STRENGTHENING OPDs FOR ADVOCACY**	How can OPDs be supported to advocate effectively for and include children with disabilities?
RQ5	**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION MODELS**	What cost-effective, scalable models of inclusive education work in low-resource settings to promote enrolment, retention, learning and development?
RQ6	**EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION**	How can early identification and intervention be integrated into primary healthcare, school and early childhood education (including through service integration and community-based programmes?

SEE ANNEX 1 FOR THE FULL LIST OF PRIORITY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

4.2 The Disability Research Prioritization Exercise

The DRPE followed a three-phase participatory approach, applying a modified Delphi method to identify key research topics that advance the inclusion of children with disabilities. The process engaged 170 stakeholders, including children and youth with disabilities, OPDs, researchers, donors and United Nations entities.

Through two global surveys and validation workshops, participants prioritized research areas based on urgency, feasibility and potential impact. Discussions also examined research methodologies, the mainstreaming of disability across thematic areas, and the role of OPDs and children with disabilities as co-creators and leaders in research efforts.

Figure 3: Phases of the DRPE

1

An **open survey** gathered 43 key research questions from global experts and OPDs, covering diverse thematic areas.

2

170 stakeholders **ranked and prioritized** these questions based on urgency, feasibility and impact potential.

3

A series of workshops were held with all stakeholders to validate and contextualize the findings of the research prioritization.

Stakeholders broadly supported the Research Agenda, bringing distinct perspectives:

- Donors emphasized its potential to inform policy and programming and called for greater OPD involvement in decision-making.
- Researchers welcomed the agenda's ambition and relevance, urging stronger links between research, policymaking and human rights-based approaches.
- United Nations entities and international non-governmental organizations saw the agenda as a tool to strengthen cross-sector collaboration and promote evidence-based action.

This process reinforced the necessity of engaging OPDs and their role in advocacy for engaging children with disabilities in research – embedding their voices at key stages of research design and agenda-setting.

What are the research priorities?

Through the DRPE, stakeholders identified six key research questions critical for shaping effective policies and programmes. Their input led to a more comprehensive longlist of 43 priority questions reflecting the collective insights of stakeholders, each of which reflects an area in which there are persistent gaps in knowledge *(see Annex 1)*.[4] The full report of the DRPE is available for download here. The section below provides a little more detail on each of the top priority areas and why they matter for children with disabilities.

Violence prevention and protection from harm

Why it matters: Children with disabilities face higher risks of violence, neglect and abuse than their peers. This includes bullying in schools, institutional mistreatment, family violence and exploitation in humanitarian settings. However, global and national child protection systems can fail to identify and respond to these risks, leaving children unprotected.

Key sub-themes:

- Investigating the scale and drivers of violence against children with disabilities in different settings.
- Understanding the barriers to reporting abuse and accessing support services.
- Evaluating successful prevention programmes and how they can be scaled up.

Priority research questions:

RQ1. What are effective models of prevention and protection for children with disabilities from violence and abuse within their communities, schools and institutions, including peer violence?

RQ2. How can we effectively prevent and protect children with disabilities from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and abandonment by their families and caregivers?

Social protection and economic inclusion

Why it matters: Families of children with disabilities often face higher living expenses, including healthcare, assistive technology and specialized education. However, not all social protection programmes explicitly account for those disability expenses.

Key sub-themes:

- Evaluating how social protection programmes (such as cash transfers) can be designed to support children with disabilities better.
- Investigating the economic burden of disability on households and long-term well-being.
- Identifying scalable social protection models that have successfully reached children with disabilities.

Priority research question:

RQ3. What social protection interventions effectively relieve families of disability-related expenses and ensure access to affordable support services and devices?

Supporting OPDs for advocacy

Why it matters: Children with disabilities face systemic exclusion from decision-making processes, despite commitments to their participation in policies affecting them. OPDs play a critical role in advocating for inclusion, yet they often lack the funding and research capacity to drive change.

Key sub-themes:

- Identifying effective ways to support OPD-led research and advocacy.
- Investigating the impact of youth participation programmes on policy change.
- Understanding how child-led and youth-led initiatives can be strengthened.

Priority research question:

RQ4. How can OPDs be supported to advocate effectively for and include children with disabilities?

Inclusive education models

Why it matters: Children with disabilities are less likely to enrol in school and more likely to drop out, and face significant barriers to accessing quality education. Achieving inclusive education requires teacher training, accessible learning materials, adaptive infrastructure and supportive policies. However, evidence on effective, scalable interventions remains limited, particularly in low-resource settings. Strengthening this evidence base is essential for guiding policies and investments that ensure equitable learning opportunities for all children.

Key sub-themes:

- Investigating teacher training models that best support inclusive classrooms.
- Understanding how to improve access to early childhood education for children with disabilities.
- Investigating early childhood interventions.
- Identifying cost-effective interventions for improving learning outcomes.

Priority research question:

RQ5. What cost-effective, scalable models of inclusive education work in low-resource settings to promote enrolment, retention, learning and development?

Early identification and intervention

Why it matters: Early identification and intervention is a broad, multisectoral approach that plays a crucial role in ensuring that children receive the support they need to reach their full potential. The early years of a child's life are a critical window for detecting developmental delays, disabilities and other impairments. Timely and appropriate responses can significantly enhance children's learning, participation and well-being, reducing barriers to education, social inclusion and long-term opportunities.

Key sub-themes:

- Investigating how early childhood identification can be integrated into community and family services, education and social protection.
- Assessing the impact of early childhood interventions on long-term educational and social outcomes.
- Understanding the barriers families face in accessing disability-inclusive early intervention programmes.

Priority research question:

RQ6. How can early identification and intervention be integrated into primary healthcare, school and early childhood education (including through service integration and community-based programmes)?

In summary, the research questions reflect the immediate need for targeted, evidence-based solutions to prevent violence and neglect, mitigate financial burden, strengthen OPD advocacy, improve inclusive education, and expand early childhood identification and intervention services.

Together, they point to the structural and systemic barriers that limit opportunities for children with disabilities to thrive, and emphasize the need for action-oriented research that can drive meaningful change.

Through the process of conducting the research prioritization exercise, the importance of intersectionality in shaping inclusion and protection became increasingly evident. This highlighted how factors such as gender, socioeconomic status and disability type interact to influence the experiences of children with disabilities. These dimensions are not just peripheral considerations but are embedded throughout the longlist of all 43 research questions, reflecting the need for evidence that captures diverse lived experiences.

CHAPTER 5

The voice of lived experience

> *"Nothing About Us Without Us" – Widely popularized by disability activist Michael Masutha*

Stakeholders across the realms of research, policy and advocacy agree: the evidence base on children with disabilities is insufficient, limiting progress towards meaningful inclusion. Existing research is often fragmented, lacks disability-disaggregated data and fails to account for the lived realities of children with disabilities – particularly those in LMICs. Without significant investment in research, inclusive policies and interventions risk being ineffective, underfunded or misaligned with real needs.

Through developing the Research Agenda, stakeholders identified critical gaps and priorities for advancing disability-inclusive research. Their perspectives highlight:

- the urgent need for increased investment – ensuring that research leads to policy impact and meaningful change;

- the necessity of participatory research – centring the voices of children and youth with disabilities in shaping research agendas and methodologies;
- the importance of strengthening research methodologies – adapting data collection tools to be fully accessible and inclusive;
- a commitment to the twin-track approach – balancing targeted disability research with mainstreaming disability across broader child-focused studies;
- the role of OPDs as research leaders – ensuring that research is not just about children with disabilities but conducted with and by them; and
- the need for intersectional analysis – recognizing how disability interacts with gender, poverty, conflict and other factors shaping children's experiences.

The following section presents stakeholder insights on these themes, outlining their priorities for closing the disability research gap.

5.1 The urgent need for investment in disability research

> *"We cannot create inclusive policies if we do not have the evidence to show what works. Research on disability inclusion is decades behind other child-focused areas." – Researcher*

Across all groups, stakeholders agreed that funding for disability research is inadequate, particularly in LMICs. Many existing datasets exclude disability entirely, making children with disabilities invisible in national statistics and global reporting. OPDs emphasized that, without research, advocacy efforts remain unsupported by evidence, limiting impact.

Stakeholders also highlighted that violence, abuse and discrimination remain under-researched. Research is needed to understand both systemic and interpersonal barriers, including stigma in schools, exclusion from services, and heightened risks of violence for girls and children with intellectual disabilities. Without a clear evidence base, efforts to address these issues remain fragmented and underfunded.

5.2 Centring the voices of children with disabilities in research

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“Too often, research is done about us, but not with us. We need to co-create solutions, not just be studied.” – Youth advocate

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Stakeholders consistently called for research that is co-created with children and youth with disabilities, ensuring their direct age-appropriate participation in shaping research priorities, methodologies and outcomes. OPDs highlighted the need for better partnerships between researchers and disability-led organizations to ensure that research findings translate into action.

A major concern raised was the lack of disability inclusion in education research. Many studies examine learning outcomes and education quality but fail to capture the experiences of children with disabilities, leading to exclusion from education sector investments. Research must explore barriers to inclusive education, including teacher preparedness, accessible learning materials, and the intersection of disability and poverty in school access.

5.3 Strengthening research methodologies for inclusion

“Disability-inclusive research requires adapted methodologies – not just adding a disability question to a survey.” – OPD representative

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Stakeholders emphasized that traditional research approaches are often inaccessible to people with disabilities. There is an urgent need to:

- improve disability disaggregation in all data collection efforts;
- develop research methods that account for diverse disabilities, including intellectual and communication disabilities; and
- ensure that findings are presented in accessible formats for wider dissemination.

Additionally, research accessibility is crucial. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of participatory research methodologies that include the meaningful engagement of children and youth with disabilities. Research must incorporate accessible tools and formats, such as easy-read materials, sign language videos and alternative communication methods, to ensure full and equal participation.

Research on gender-based violence (GBV) must also adopt a disability-inclusive lens. Many GBV studies exclude disability data, even though girls with disabilities face significantly higher risks of sexual violence, exploitation and forced sterilization. Understanding how gender and disability intersect in risk and response is critical for improving protection systems and service accessibility.

5.4 The twin-track approach: Targeted and mainstreamed research

> *"We need both: specific research on disability and better inclusion of disability in broader studies. Without both, we will keep missing critical gaps." – UN research partner*

Participants agreed that a twin-track approach is needed – ensuring both targeted studies on disability-specific issues (e.g., access to assistive technology, inclusive education models) and the mainstreaming of disability in broader child-focused research (e.g., education, health, climate change).

A key example is violence prevention research. Many existing child protection studies assess violence and abuse in schools, homes and institutions, but fail to capture how children with disabilities experience violence differently – for example, they have a greater reliance on caregivers, are at increased risk in institutional settings and face barriers to reporting abuse.

5.5 Strengthening OPD leadership and advocacy in research

"OPDs must lead the research on issues affecting us. Otherwise, the evidence produced won't reflect our realities or our priorities." – OPD representative

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OPDs play a critical role in ensuring that research is designed, conducted and used effectively to drive policy and advocacy. However, many OPDs – particularly those in LMICs – face significant barriers to engaging in research efforts, including:

- limited access to research funding despite being key stakeholders;
- a lack of meaningful partnerships with research institutions, leading to OPDs being consulted only after research is designed; and
- inaccessible research methodologies, which often exclude persons with disabilities from participating in studies.

To strengthen OPD leadership in disability research, stakeholders emphasized the need to:

- directly fund OPDs to co-lead research projects and shape priorities;
- build sustained partnerships between OPDs, academia and development agencies to ensure that research is locally relevant and actionable; and
- provide training and technical support to OPDs to enhance their capacity for data collection, analysis and advocacy.

Without direct investment in OPD-led research, the risk remains that disability research will be done about children with disabilities, rather than with and by them.

5.6 Intersectionality: Recognizing the multiple identities of children with disabilities

"Disability research cannot be one-size-fits-all. We need to understand how disability intersects with gender, poverty, ethnicity and displacement." – Youth advocate

Disability must not be treated as a **standalone category** in research; instead, it should be examined **in relation to other key factors** such as gender, socioeconomic status, geography and ethnicity to capture differences in lived experiences:

- **Gender:** Girls with disabilities face greater risks of GBV, lower school enrolment rates and fewer economic opportunities.
- **Poverty:** Families of children with disabilities face higher healthcare, assistive device and education costs, worsening economic hardship and increasing vulnerability to the worst forms of child labour.
- **Geography:** Children with disabilities in rural areas often have even less access to services than those in urban centres.
- **Conflict, migration and displacement:** Displaced children with disabilities, including refugees and the internally displaced, face severe exclusion from humanitarian assistance, education and child protection services.

To integrate intersectionality effectively into disability research, stronger cross-sectoral collaboration is essential. Research on gender, poverty, child protection and humanitarian responses must embed disability perspectives to ensure that children with disabilities are treated as individuals whose experiences are shaped by multiple intersecting factors – including the various forms of disabilities.

Stakeholders consistently emphasized that children with disabilities face diverse challenges and opportunities based on the type and severity of their impairments. They urged that research and policy responses must reflect this diversity rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

CHAPTER 6

A strategy for implementing the Research Agenda

The Research Agenda is a collaborative, evidence-driven approach to addressing long-standing gaps in disability research. By establishing clear research priorities, identifying investment needs and calling for collective action, it lays the foundation for more participatory, impactful and policy-relevant research. It must be implemented effectively and strategically to drive real-world change. This section sets out that strategy to meet the vision of the Research Agenda.

The strategy for implementing the Research Agenda is built around five key goal areas:

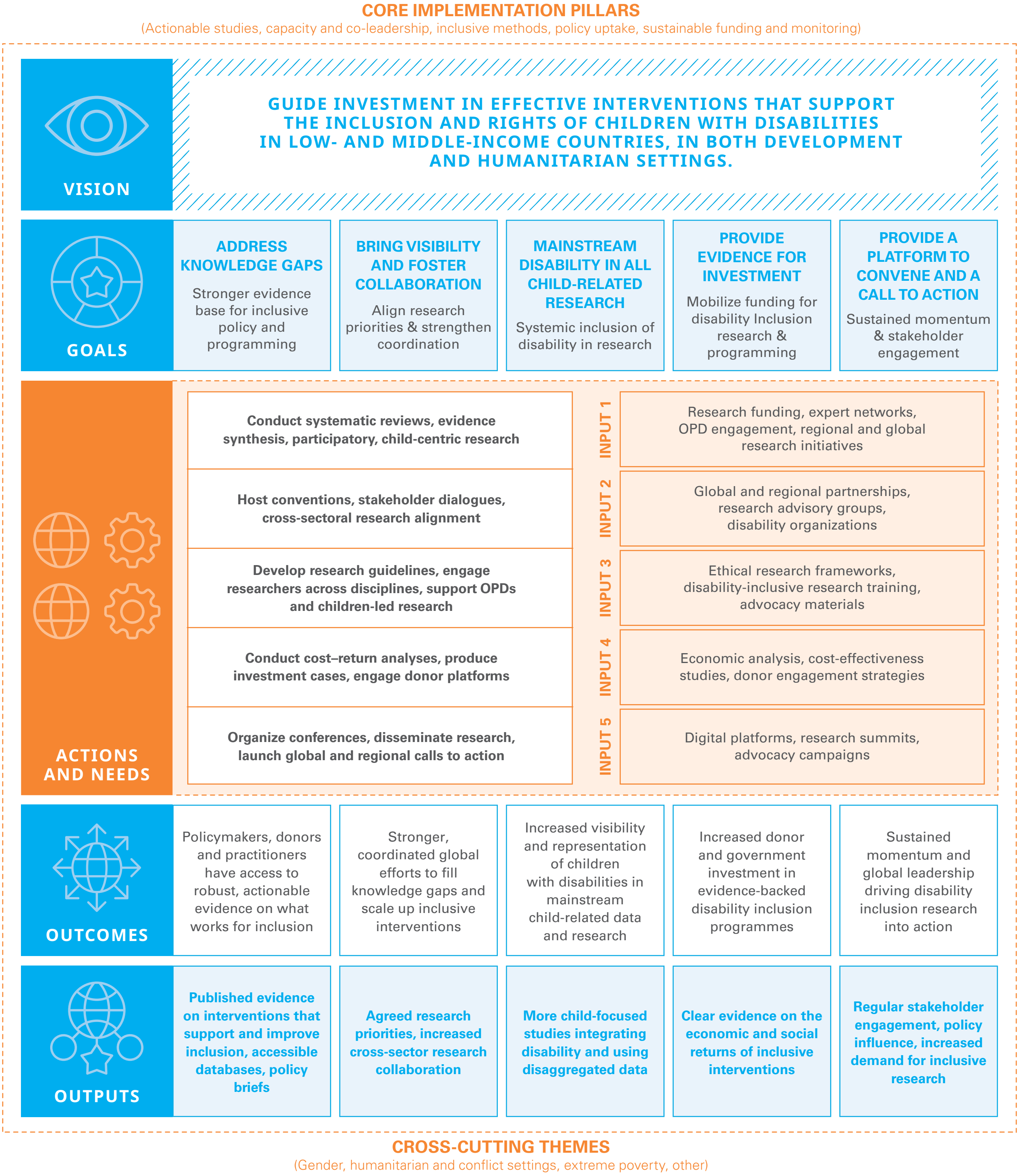
1. **Address knowledge gaps** → The lack of reliable, high-quality research on what works to overcome the barriers faced by children with disabilities remains one of the greatest challenges to effective policy and programme design.[5] The strategy emphasizes

systematic evidence generation, synthesis and dissemination to ensure that decisions at all levels are based on robust, contextualized data.

2. **Bring visibility and foster collaboration** → Historically, research on disability inclusion has been fragmented, lacking the necessary coordination between researchers, donors, OPDs and policymakers. By aligning research priorities, strengthening cross-sectoral partnerships and ensuring that the voices of children and youth with disabilities are central, this strategy helps drive a more coherent and collaborative approach to evidence generation and uptake.
3. **Mainstream disability in all research** → Disability inclusion must not be treated as a niche area of study. Instead, the Global Disability Research Strategy calls for the integration of disability perspectives into all child-focused research, including education, health, climate change and humanitarian programming. By embedding disability as a standard lens across research fields, this approach ensures that disability is no longer overlooked but systematically addressed in global policy and development efforts *(see Annex 3)*.
4. **Provide evidence for investment** → Research must generate the evidence needed to support and scale up proven strategies that advance the rights and inclusion of children with disabilities. A key challenge of disability inclusion is identifying which programmes to invest in. Investing in research that focuses on priority areas – demonstrating 'what works' and where impact can be achieved – is central to the Research Agenda and helps drive long-term commitments from governments, donors and other stakeholders.
5. **Provide a platform to convene and call to action** → To sustain momentum, it is critical to establish a dedicated space for knowledge sharing, advocacy and coordination. The strategy calls for regular conventions, regional and global research summits, and knowledge exchange platforms that ensure that research findings are actively shaping policies and funding priorities rather than remaining as static reports. This approach ensures that disability research stays visible, relevant and influential in shaping global and national agendas.

A theory of change is presented in Figure 4, with proposed activities, results and cross-cutting themes for meeting the Research Agenda goals. It serves as a structured guide for strengthening both targeted and mainstreamed disability research and for taking the Research Agenda forward. It clarifies how research activities lead to long-term results that drive investment in effective, evidence-based interventions.

Figure 4: Global Disability Research Strategy



CORE IMPLEMENTATION PILLARS

(Actionable studies, capacity and co-leadership, inclusive methods, policy uptake, sustainable funding and monitoring)

VISION

GUIDE INVESTMENT IN EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS THAT SUPPORT THE INCLUSION AND RIGHTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES, IN BOTH DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS.

GOALS	**ADDRESS KNOWLEDGE GAPS** Stronger evidence base for inclusive policy and programming	**BRING VISIBILITY AND FOSTER COLLABORATION** Align research priorities & strengthen coordination	**MAINSTREAM DISABILITY IN ALL CHILD-RELATED RESEARCH** Systemic inclusion of disability in research	**PROVIDE EVIDENCE FOR INVESTMENT** Mobilize funding for disability Inclusion research & programming	**PROVIDE A PLATFORM TO CONVENE AND A CALL TO ACTION** Sustained momentum & stakeholder engagement

ACTIONS AND NEEDS

Conduct systematic reviews, evidence synthesis, participatory, child-centric research	INPUT 1	Research funding, expert networks, OPD engagement, regional and global research initiatives
Host conventions, stakeholder dialogues, cross-sectoral research alignment	INPUT 2	Global and regional partnerships, research advisory groups, disability organizations
Develop research guidelines, engage researchers across disciplines, support OPDs and children-led research	INPUT 3	Ethical research frameworks, disability-inclusive research training, advocacy materials
Conduct cost–return analyses, produce investment cases, engage donor platforms	INPUT 4	Economic analysis, cost-effectiveness studies, donor engagement strategies
Organize conferences, disseminate research, launch global and regional calls to action	INPUT 5	Digital platforms, research summits, advocacy campaigns

OUTCOMES	Policymakers, donors and practitioners have access to robust, actionable evidence on what works for inclusion	Stronger, coordinated global efforts to fill knowledge gaps and scale up inclusive interventions	Increased visibility and representation of children with disabilities in mainstream child-related data and research	Increased donor and government investment in evidence-backed disability inclusion programmes	Sustained momentum and global leadership driving disability inclusion research into action
OUTPUTS	**Published evidence on interventions that support and improve inclusion, accessible databases, policy briefs**	**Agreed research priorities, increased cross-sector research collaboration**	**More child-focused studies integrating disability and using disaggregated data**	**Clear evidence on the economic and social returns of inclusive interventions**	**Regular stakeholder engagement, policy influence, increased demand for inclusive research**

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

(Gender, humanitarian and conflict settings, extreme poverty, other)

Advancing disability-inclusive research requires a strategic, well-structured approach that ensures that evidence generation translates into meaningful action. This framework is built on key enablers – the foundational elements that create an environment where disability research can thrive – and implementation pillars that provide a clear, actionable road map for integrating research into policy and practice. Political and institutional commitment, sustained funding, capacity strengthening, inclusive methodologies and data innovation are critical to fostering impactful research.

By embedding these elements into research practices, this strategy ensures that disability research is ethical and effective, and leads to real-world change for children with disabilities.

6.1 Key enablers

- **Political and institutional commitment:** Advocacy and engagement to integrate disability research into national and global research agendas.
- **Sustained funding:** Dedicated investment to ensure long-term financial support for disability-inclusive research.
- **Capacity strengthening:** Training and empowering OPDs, and youth with disabilities and researchers with lived experience, to lead research efforts.
- **Inclusive research tools and methods:** Ensuring fully accessible research platforms and advancing intersectional approaches to capture diverse experiences.
- **Data innovation and technology:** Ethically leveraging artificial intelligence, digital platforms and participatory tools to enhance data collection and accessibility.
- **Knowledge translation and research uptake:** Strengthening partnerships to ensure thatesearch findings inform policy and practice.
- **Monitoring and adaptation:** Regular stock-taking to track progress and keep research responsive to emerging priorities.

6.2 Implementation pillars

To drive meaningful change, this strategy is structured around six core implementation pillars *(see Figure 5)*, providing an actionable framework to ensure that research informs policy and practice, strengthens co-leadership and secures long-term investment.

Figure 5: Implementation pillars

PILLAR 1
ESTABLISHING DISABILITY RESEARCH PRIORITIES

PILLAR 2
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SECURING SUSTAINABLE INVESTMENT IN DISABILITY RESEARCH

PILLAR 6
MEASURING IMPACT AND ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY

Pillar 1. Establishing disability research priorities

Governments, funders and research institutions should integrate disability research into national and global research agendas, ensuring alignment with the United Nations SDGs, UNDIS and other global frameworks. The DRPE[6] provides a foundation for defining priority research areas – aligning with the prioritized research questions about children with disabilities *(see Figure 1)*.

- Research should align with policy and programming needs to maximize real-world impact.[7]
- Funders should ensure dedicated financing for disability research, recognizing its role in upholding child rights and advancing development goals.
- Localized research action plans should be developed, especially in LMICs.

Pillar 2. Strengthening research capacity and co-leadership

Research must be co-created and co-led by persons with disabilities, moving beyond tokenistic engagement. OPDs, children and youth with disabilities, and researchers with lived experience should play an active role in defining priorities, designing, implementing, analysing and communicating research findings.

- Research capacity building should be strengthened to equip OPDs and researchers with the skills and resources needed to co-lead and contribute meaningfully.
- Research governance should be made inclusive, embedding OPDs in advisory roles and decision-making structures to advocate for and include children with disabilities.

Pillar 3. Advancing inclusive and intersectional research approaches

Disability research must be inclusive, accessible and participatory, ensuring that children with disabilities can fully engage in an age-appropriate way in research processes and decision-making.

- Disability inclusion should be considered in all mainstream research about children.
- Accessible, participatory methodologies should be developed and applied, incorporating diverse formats such as easy read, sign language, Braille and audio descriptions.
- An intersectional lens should be applied, considering disability, gender, poverty, geography, ethnicity and humanitarian status.
- The collection and use of disaggregated data should be improved and qualitative research approaches strengthened, to capture lived experiences.
- Inclusive methodologies should be expanded, especially in humanitarian and fragile settings, to address the barriers faced by children with disabilities.

Pillar 4. Enhancing research uptake and knowledge translation

Ensuring that research findings inform policies, programmes and services requires accessible dissemination and strong engagement with policymakers, practitioners and communities.

- Research outputs must follow international accessibility standards and be available in multiple accessible formats.
- Partnerships with policymakers, OPDs, United Nations agencies and civil society must be strengthened, bridging the gap between research and implementation.
- Regional dialogues and learning platforms should be established, ensuring direct input from OPDs and children with disabilities in shaping research priorities and dissemination strategies.

Pillar 5. Securing sustainable investment in disability research

Governments and donors must commit to long-term, sustainable investment in disability research, ensuring that resources match the scale of need.

- Dedicated disability research funding streams must be advocated for, promoting the allocation of 5 to 10 per cent of child-focused research funding specifically to disability inclusion.
- Disability research should be integrated into mainstream research funding mechanisms, ensuring that it is not siloed or deprioritized.
- Funding mechanisms should support long-term, multi-country studies, strengthening local research capacity in LMICs.

Pillar 6. Measuring impact and ensuring accountability

To track progress and ensure thatresearch investments lead to real-world improvements, a robust accountability framework is required.

- Tracking systems should be established to measure how disability-inclusive research influences policy and practice.
- Regular stock-taking exercises should be conducted to identify emerging research gaps, and priorities adapted accordingly.
- The Research Agenda should be maintained as a living document, ensuring adaptability to new insights and evolving priorities.
- Collaborative impact evaluations should be promoted to measure the effectiveness of interventions, ensuring that findings translate into meaningful change.
- Accessible and transparent reports should be published to keep stakeholders informed and engaged.
- The Disability Research Strategy *(see Figure 4)* provides a framework to align research investments with broader inclusion efforts, ensuring sustained impact and accountability.

6.2.1 Embedding the implementation pillars into research practices

By embedding these pillars into research design, execution and uptake, this strategy ensures that disability research is ethical and impactful, and leads to practical interventions.

Strengthening co-leadership, inclusive methodologies and long-term investment will ensure that evidence generation not only fills critical knowledge gaps but also advances the rights and inclusion of children with disabilities worldwide.

6.3 Cross-cutting themes

The following cross-cutting themes must be considered across all research efforts to ensure disability inclusion is holistic and responsive to diverse needs:

- **Intersectionality and inclusion** → Ensuring that research considers how disability intersects with gender, poverty, ethnicity, displacement and other marginalizing factors.
- **Ethical and participatory research practices** → Strengthening co-creation methodologies that actively involve children with disabilities.
- **Decolonizing research and Global South leadership** → Promoting research designed and led by scholars, practitioners and OPDs in LMICs.
- **Climate and environmental sustainability** → Understanding how environmental factors and climate-related shocks affect children with disabilities.
- **Humanitarian and fragile contexts** → Ensuring inclusive research methodologies are applied in humanitarian emergencies to assess risks, interventions and protection measures for children with disabilities.

6.4 Translating the research strategy into action

For the Research Agenda to achieve its intended impact, it is crucial to ensure that each element of the Global Disability Research Strategy is operationalized. This means:

- **Generating research that fills critical gaps** → Systematic reviews, evidence gap mapping and primary studies must be conducted in partnership with the Global South to ensure that research is locally relevant.
- **Strengthening research uptake** → Findings must be accessible, actionable and widely disseminated to influence policy and programmatic decisions.
- **Embedding research in policy and programming** → Evidence must be translated into practical guidelines, shaping government and organizational strategies on disability inclusion.
- **Ensuring long-term investment and sustainability** → A coordinated effort is needed to mobilize funding and embed disability research within broader child-focused studies.

6.5 A framework for lasting change

The Research Agenda – supported by the Global Disability Research Strategy – provides a clear, structured and action-driven pathway to closing evidence gaps and promoting inclusive research practices. However, its success depends on collective action.

By ensuring that research not only generates knowledge but also leads to stronger policies, increased funding and practical interventions, we can build a research landscape that truly serves all children, including those with disabilities.

This framework presents a unique opportunity to transform the way disability research is conducted, funded and applied. If fully implemented, it will serve as a cornerstone for inclusive development, ensuring that no child is left behind.

CHAPTER 7

A call to action

7.1 Invest in research to drive inclusion

The Research Agenda provides a clear and urgent road map for addressing evidence gaps and ensuring that children with disabilities are no longer excluded from global research efforts. However, without investment and commitment from governments, donors, research institutions, OPDs, UNICEF and development partners, these priorities will remain unmet. Each stakeholder in the global community has a role to play in driving inclusive research forward:

1. Governments: Embed disability in national research strategies

- Integrate disability within national research frameworks and ensure that it is systematically included in all child-focused studies.
- Commit long-term funding to disability-inclusive research.
- Use evidence to shape inclusive policies and ensure that findings translate into action at the national level.

2. Donors, foundations and funders: Allocate resources for disability-inclusive research

- Prioritize dedicated funding streams for disability research.
- Ensure that all relevant research proposals consider issues of disability inclusion in their conceptualization and design.
- Fund research that requires strong participation from OPDs and children with disabilities.

3. Research institutions: Train and equip researchers for inclusive research

- Provide training in disability-inclusive methodologies to ensure ethical and meaningful engagement.
- Ensure that research tools and platforms are accessible, including surveys, data collection methods and dissemination formats.
- Integrate disability considerations across all major studies, not just those specifically focused on disability.

4. OPDs, children and youth with disabilities: Lead and monitor disability research

- Ensure meaningful, age-appropriate involvement of children and youth with disabilities in shaping research priorities and methodologies.
- Engage in research agenda-setting to ensure that priorities reflect lived experiences.
- Actively co-design and implement studies, moving beyond tokenistic involvement.
- Monitor research progress and uptake, ensuring that findings lead to meaningful change.

5. UNICEF and other development agencies and their partners: Strengthen global commitments and knowledge exchange

- Advocate for global commitments to disability-inclusive research and ensure that it is prioritized in major policy frameworks.
- Promote cross-sectoral collaboration to embed disability research within mainstream development agendas.
- Facilitate knowledge exchange and capacity building to support governments, researchers and OPDs in conducting inclusive research.

7.2 Closing remarks

Investing in high-quality, disability-inclusive research is the key to ensuring that all children – not just some – benefit from global development efforts. By funding and prioritizing the Research Agenda, we can drive meaningful change, create evidence-based policies and build a more inclusive future for all children.

However, commitment alone is not enough. Research must lead to action – informing policies, shaping interventions and ensuring that findings translate into measurable improvements in the lives of children with disabilities. The evidence is clear, the priorities are defined. The next step is collective action. All stakeholders – governments, donors, researchers and OPDs – must take responsibility for advancing this agenda.

A world where children with disabilities are fully included, their rights upheld and their potential realized is within reach – but only if we invest in the knowledge that will make it possible.

ANNEX 1

Priority research questions

This annex presents the full list of priority research questions identified through the global consultation and prioritization exercise. The questions highlight critical evidence gaps that should be addressed to advance the inclusion of children with disabilities.

Guiding future research and investment: Identifying priority research areas

Advancing the inclusion and rights of children with disabilities requires a strong, evidence-based foundation. To guide future research and investment, a global Disability Research Prioritization Exercise (DRPE) engaged a diverse network of stakeholders, including children and youth with disabilities, researchers, practitioners, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), donors and foundations, and policymakers.

Through a structured process, 43 research questions were identified as critical to strengthening inclusive policies, services and interventions for children with disabilities. These questions represent the most pressing knowledge gaps that, if addressed, have the potential to drive meaningful change in global, national and local policies and programming.

The research priorities outlined in this annex provide a road map for donors, policymakers and research institutions to target investments where they will have the greatest impact. Areas with high expert consensus signal broad agreement on the need for new evidence.

A full report detailing the methodology, analysis and scoring factors is published separately,[8] offering a deeper exploration of the research prioritization process and its implications for global research agendas and funding strategies.

How the questions were prioritized

To ensure that the research priorities reflect the collective expertise and lived experiences of stakeholders, a two-phase process was undertaken:

1. **Global stakeholder consultation:** In the first phase, experts from multiple sectors identified critical research gaps. Their responses were synthesized into 43 key research questions.
2. **Prioritization survey:** In the second phase, a wider pool of stakeholders evaluated the importance of these questions, providing quantitative rankings.

The final prioritization was based on three key measures:

- **Frequency Score (FS):** How often a question was selected as a top priority by respondents.
- **Priority Score (PS):** The level of importance stakeholders assigned to each question, based on average ratings.
- **Average Expert Agreement (AEA):** The extent to which respondents agreed on the importance of a question.

Together, these three measures provided a balanced assessment of which research questions were most valued by stakeholders. By combining how frequently a question was prioritized, how strongly it was rated and how much consensus existed among experts, we identified the most pressing evidence gaps that require further research and investment.

In plain language: The final list reflects not only which research questions were chosen most often, but also how important the stakeholders felt they were and how much agreement there was among experts.

The following pages present the full list of 43 research questions, ranked based on stakeholder priorities and consensus. These questions are not just theoretical – they are directly linked to real-world challenges in education, health, social protection and disability-inclusive development.

By aligning research efforts with these priorities, we can close critical evidence gaps, strengthen policies and ultimately improve the lives of children with disabilities worldwide.

Table 1: Prioritized research questions for advancing the inclusion of children with disabilities – Frequency Score (FS), Priority Score (PS), Average Expert Agreement (AEA)

Rank	Research questions	FS	PS	AEA
Quartile 1 (25% of RQs with highest frequency)				
1	What are effective models of prevention and protection of children with disabilities from different forms of violence and abuse within their communities, schools and institutions, including by their peers?	39.8	91.9	70.8
2	How can we effectively prevent and protect children with disabilities from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and abandonment by their families and caregivers?	31.1	93.1	74
3	What social protection interventions are effective in relieving families of children with disabilities from disability-related expenses and ensuring their access to appropriate and affordable support services (including rehabilitation and care) and devices (including assistive technology)?	26.7	92.3	69.8
4	How can OPDs be supported to advocate effectively for and include children with disabilities in their activities?	22.7	88.3	57.3
5	What cost-effective inclusive education models work at scale in low-resource settings in promoting enrolment, retention, learning and development of children with disabilities?	21.4	95.8	85.3
6	How can early identification and intervention for children with disabilities (e.g., assistive technologies, rehabilitation and therapy, adapted teaching, support) be integrated through primary healthcare, school and early childhood education (including through service integration and community-based programmes)?	20.4	92.3	71.3
7	How can children with disabilities be ensured full and equitable access to justice and redressal systems (including to just and equitable outcomes, reparation and compensation), particularly for those residing in institutions?	18.5	84.9	51
8	What are effective approaches to supporting families and caregivers with tailored, accessible information, knowledge and skills to ensure the best care for children with disabilities?	15.7	86.5	52.6
9	What approaches are effective in protecting and promoting the mental health and well-being of families and caregivers of children with disabilities?	15.0	91.3	64.6
10	What types of interventions are effective in supporting the participation in society and community life of children with disabilities facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (including sex, gender, sexuality, age, poverty, religion, ethnicity and race)?	14.8	92.1	64.6

Rank	Research questions	FS	PS	AEA
Quartile 2				
11	Which policies and legal frameworks are effective in promoting inclusion and preventing and challenging discrimination of children with disabilities?	13.7	86.7	54.2
12	What are effective approaches to overcoming educational access barriers for all children with disabilities, through all levels of education?	13.7	90.6	67.7
13	What approaches are effective in preventing institutionalization and promoting the community living of children with disabilities?	12.9	89.5	61
14	What are effective policy frameworks for assessing and strengthening the capacity of education facilities to transition to inclusive education systems that promote access, retention and learning of children with disabilities?	12.8	89.4	64.2
15	How can children with disabilities access the highest attainable standard of general and impairment-related healthcare (including screening and referral, diagnosis, treatment and continuing support) without discrimination on the basis of disability?	11.7	88.8	61
16	What are the effective preventive and mitigation strategies for exacerbated violence and abuse experienced by girls with disabilities during humanitarian and crisis contexts?	10.4	91	67
17	What are cost-effective measures to address access and accessibility barriers faced by children with disabilities and their families, when accessing statutory health, educational and other basic services (including WASH)?	10.4	91.1	66.3
18	How can we promote the collection of disability-screening data and ensure the quality and reliability of its recording and use within education information management systems for improved planning and budgeting?	10.4	85.5	53.7
19	What interventions and strategies are effective in promoting the meaningful participation of children with a range of disabilities in decision-making processes that affect them?	10.2	88.7	60.4
20	What training and awareness-raising programmes are effective in reducing stigmatization and harmful attitudes, and in supporting the inclusion of children with disabilities within their communities and among their peers?	10.1	89.2	58.3
21	What types of interventions are effective in addressing the barriers to access of statutory and support services faced by children with disabilities alongside multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (including sex, gender, sexuality, age, poverty, religion, ethnicity and race)?	10.1	88.3	56.8

Rank	Research questions	FS	PS	AEA
Quartile 3				
22	How can children with disabilities be meaningfully and ethically engaged in research processes (including from design to implementation, analysis and communication)?	10.0	82.8	50.5
23	What are effective approaches to promoting the access and inclusion of children with disabilities in arts, culture, leisure activities and sport within their communities?	9.5	86.5	52.6
24	What are effective approaches to the equitable provision of appropriate and affordable assistive technologies for children with a wide range of disabilities (including human capacity, appropriate design, sourcing, fitting or use, and continued maintenance)?	9.5	89.9	58.9
25	What mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation need to be in place to ensure effective implementation and accountability of rights-based, inclusive and anti-discriminatory legislation and public policies?	9.2	87.8	57.3
26	What are effective approaches to raising awareness and knowledge and promoting positive attitudes towards disability among the teachers and school staff that best support children with disabilities?	9.0	89.8	64.2
27	What interventions are effective in reducing children with disabilities' internalized stigma and in strengthening their self-esteem and self-efficacy?	8.4	88.4	54.2
28	How can children with disabilities be equitably included in humanitarian programming and service delivery (including through operationalization of Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidelines), in relation to, for example, health, nutrition, education, protection?	8.0	91.6	71
29	What are effective elements of formal and informal community support practices, and how can these be included in the development and sustainable provision of community-based support services for children with disabilities (including for assessment, care, rehabilitation)?	7.5	88.8	57.4
30	How can healthcare providers (including primary, specialized and community-based healthcare) best be equipped with adequate knowledge, tools and attitudes to deliver appropriate and high-quality care to children with disabilities?	7.5	90.1	67.4
31	What interventions (including through improved representation in media and communications campaigns) are effective in sustainably addressing negative social norms, beliefs and harmful attitudes towards children with disabilities?	7.1	88.2	53.1
32	How can adolescents with disabilities be best supported in their transition to higher education, training, and suitable and decent employment?	7.1	88	59.4

Rank	Research questions	FS	PS	AEA
Quartile 4 (25% of RQs with lowest frequency)				
33	What are effective inclusive education practices that enhance learning, academic progression and achievement and support children with a range of disabilities in achieving their full potential?	6.9	92.6	70.5
34	What are cost-effective support measures (at family, community and social service levels) to promote children with disabilities' development, particularly those with significant and complex impairments?	6.4	87.6	57.3
35	What are effective teacher training packages that integrate principles of disability inclusion and communication tools that promote inclusive pedagogical practices (including through Universal Design for Learning)?	6.0	89.5	65.6
36	How can sustainable rehabilitation systems be developed and delivered for children with disabilities in low-income settings, and how can different actors at community level best be engaged?	5.5	87.3	56.2
37	What are the critical provisions required (at family, community and social services levels) for adolescents with disabilities to transition effectively to living independently as adults?	4.2	86.2	53.1
38	What are the most effective inclusive pedagogical approaches to optimize learning of children with a range of disabilities (including through Universal Design for Learning, and approaches such as learning through play, peer learning and problem solving)?	4.2	90.2	61.7
39	What effective adaptations can be put in place to promote the mobility of children with disabilities through public spaces (including public transport)?	3.9	85.7	46.9
40	How can the mental health of children with disabilities be promoted in respectful, accessible and age-appropriate ways?	3.9	85.9	52.1
41	What approaches are effective in adapting, developing or improving accessible curricula, teaching materials and learning resources, through all levels of schooling and in informal learning settings?	2.7	88.2	54.3
42	What interventions are effective in addressing the specific barriers faced by girls with disabilities in accessing and progressing through different educational levels?	1.8	87.5	54.7
43	What are successful strategies to ensure healthcare providers and staff are able to communicate effectively and provide suitable information to children with disabilities and their families?	1.8	87.6	60.4

ANNEX 2

United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy

Introduction

The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) was launched in June 2019 and provides a framework for ensuring disability inclusion across the United Nations system, emphasizing leadership, accountability, inclusiveness, programming and organizational culture.

This annex highlights the key alignments between the Global Research Agenda for Children with Disabilities (the Research Agenda) and the UNDIS indicators, demonstrating how research efforts contribute to strengthening the United Nations system's commitments to disability inclusion.

Research agenda alignment with the UNDIS indicators

1. Leadership, strategic planning and management

UNDIS indicators: Leadership commitment, strategic planning and institutional capacity.

- The Research Agenda promotes a twin-track approach, integrating disability-specific research and mainstreaming disability across all research themes.
- Calls for investment in disability research reflect UNDIS's commitment to strategic planning and resource allocation.
- The Research Agenda supports a participatory approach, ensuring that organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and children with disabilities co-lead research, aligning with UNDIS leadership principles.

2. Inclusiveness

UNDIS indicators: Consultation with persons with disabilities, accessibility and reasonable accommodation.

- The Research Agenda embeds participatory research methodologies, ensuring that OPDs and children with disabilities shape research priorities and methodologies.
- It promotes accessibility in research methods, including tools designed for screen readers, sign language translation and multiple language options.
- The Research Agenda emphasizes intersectionality, ensuring that disability inclusion is addressed alongside other forms of marginalization (gender, poverty, geography and humanitarian status), directly supporting UNDIS inclusiveness indicators.

3. Programming

UNDIS indicators: Mainstreaming disability inclusion in United Nations programmes, evaluation and country programme documents.

- The Research Agenda's research priorities align with key programming areas under UNDIS, including education, health, social protection and humanitarian response.
- The Disability Research Prioritization Exercise (DRPE) identified six core areas for targeted disability research, reflecting UNDIS's focus on embedding disability into all programming cycles.
- The Research Agenda provides a framework for evaluating disability-inclusive programmes, reinforcing the need for data-driven policy and investment.

4. Organizational culture

UNDIS indicators: Capacity development, employment policies and communication.

- The Research Agenda highlights the need for inclusive research methodologies, ensuring disability-inclusive research capacity among researchers and practitioners.
- It calls for enhanced partnerships with OPDs, reinforcing UNDIS's push for inclusive employment and engagement practices.

- The Research Agenda advocates for data disaggregation by disability status, a critical requirement under UNDIS to improve evidence-based decision-making.

5. Strengthening accountability for disability inclusion

UNDIS indicators: Monitoring, reporting and system-wide learning.

- The Research Agenda provides a mechanism for tracking research impact on policy and programmatic change.
- It calls for a coherent, systematic approach to evidence generation, ensuring that disability research is a priority in global development and humanitarian efforts.
- The Research Agenda's focus on annual research updates and continuous gap analysis aligns with UNDIS's commitment to improving monitoring and evaluation processes.

UNICEF DIPAS

UNICEF launched its Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) in 2022, aligning closely with UNDIS to ensure that disability inclusion is mainstreamed across its policies, programmes and operations. Rooted in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, DIPAS strengthens the accountability of UNICEF, making it an inclusive and accessible organization committed to disability rights.

The Research Agenda plays a pivotal role in advancing DIPAS's cross-sectoral strategic priorities, including preventing stigma, expanding inclusive services, improving access to assistive technology and strengthening disability-inclusive humanitarian response. By promoting evidence-based decision-making and ensuring that children with disabilities and OPDs co-lead research, the Research Agenda directly supports UNICEF leadership in disability-inclusive research and reinforces its commitment to systematic learning, regionalized approaches and long-term inclusion strategies.

Summary

The Research Agenda strongly supports the UNDIS framework by prioritizing disability inclusion in research, promoting evidence-based policies and advocating for participatory approaches that align with UNDIS accountability indicators. Through its emphasis on leadership, inclusiveness, programming and monitoring, the Research Agenda directly contributes to the United Nations system's broader goals of embedding disability inclusion across all sectors.

Moving forward, continued investment in disability-inclusive research, robust partnerships with OPDs and integration of disability-related indicators into global monitoring frameworks will ensure that research findings translate into sustainable, systemic change in line with the UNDIS framework.

ANNEX 3

Strengthening disability mainstreaming in research: Key considerations and approaches

Introduction

Mainstreaming disability in research means ensuring that disability is systematically integrated across all stages of research processes – from design and data collection to implementation, analysis and dissemination. It requires moving beyond disability-specific studies and embedding disability perspectives into all child-focused research efforts, ensuring that policies, programmes and interventions are informed by inclusive evidence.

To achieve this, mainstreaming must be built into research priorities, methodologies and institutional practices. This approach ensures that persons with disabilities – particularly children – are not excluded from data collection, policy development and funding decisions.

Key considerations for mainstreaming disability in research

1. Embedding disability as a cross-cutting issue in research priorities

- Disability should not be a separate research theme but an integrated consideration across diverse fields such as education, health, social protection, digital environments, climate change and child protection.
- All research frameworks should consistently disaggregate data by disability and ensure that findings reflect the lived experiences of children with disabilities.
- Research funders and institutions must prioritize investment in disability-inclusive evidence generation, ensuring that studies inform inclusive policy and practice.

2. Ensuring institutional commitment to disability-inclusive research

- Research institutions and development organizations should adopt formal policies and guidelines that require disability inclusion in all research activities.
- Disability must be explicitly addressed in research governance structures, ensuring that inclusion is considered in funding decisions, ethics approvals and capacity-building programmes.
- Institutions should support training for researchers and policymakers on disability-inclusive research methodologies.

3. Mainstreaming disability in data collection and research methods

- Standardized tools for identifying disability (e.g., the Child Functioning Module) should be systematically applied across all research.
- Research instruments should be accessible in multiple formats, including:
  - easy-read versions for individuals with intellectual disabilities;
  - sign language and captioned materials for deaf and hard-of-hearing participants; and
  - screen reader-compatible formats for visually impaired participants.
- Enumerators and researchers must receive training in inclusive research techniques, particularly to avoid exclusionary biases in sampling and data collection.

4. Strengthening the participation of persons with disabilities in research

- Persons with disabilities, including children and youth, must be trained and engaged as active participants in shaping research agendas, methodologies and implementation strategies.
- Organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) should be recognized as key knowledge holders and partners, contributing to research design, data interpretation and policy recommendations.
- Research funding should include allocations for accessibility provisions, such as sign language interpretation, transportation support and adaptive technologies to ensure full participation.

5. Aligning research with global development agendas

- Disability-inclusive research must align with global monitoring and policy frameworks, ensuring that findings contribute to key international commitments such as:
  - the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly targets on education, employment and social protection;
  - the UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS), which calls for embedding disability across all development efforts; and
  - national disability action plans, ensuring local and regional policymaking is informed by robust disability-inclusive evidence.

6. Strengthening intersectionality in disability-inclusive research

- Disability intersects with gender, geography and socioeconomic factors, and research must reflect these realities.
- Research frameworks must address:
  - gendered impacts of disability – for example, girls with disabilities face additional risks of exclusion and violence;
  - rural and humanitarian contexts, where services for children with disabilities are more limited; and
  - economic barriers, such as the higher costs of assistive devices and healthcare for families of children with disabilities.

Final considerations

To ensure disability is fully mainstreamed in research, disability inclusion should be made a standard research variable across all disciplines.

- Adopt institutional policies that require disability-sensitive research approaches.
- Train researchers and data collectors on inclusive methodologies.
- Ensure that OPDs and persons with disabilities have an active role in research design and dissemination.
- Align research with global and national disability inclusion frameworks.

By embedding these principles into research practices, we can generate stronger, more representative evidence that informs inclusive policies and programmes for children with disabilities.

Endnotes

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6 *Disability Research Prioritization Exercise.*

7 *From Insight to Inclusion.*

8 *Disability Research Prioritization Exercise.*

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Participants

Organizations of persons with disabilities representatives: María José Carranza Padilla (Coordinator of the Collective of Women with Disabilities and Allies of Guatemala, or ‘Conectivas’), Patience Ogolo Dickson (Executive Director, Advocacy for Women with Disabilities Initiative), Ifeoluwa Faniran (Founder and Director, Iretiola Albinism Unity Network Nigeria), Susana Stiglich (Sign Language Rights Officer, World Federation of the Deaf) and Evelynne Wanjiku Ndung’u (CEO, Free a Girl’s World Network).

Donors: Lorraine Wapling (Co-Director, Impel Consultancy), Thomas Ongolo (Regional Disability Advisory, Global Programme Inclusions of Persons with Disabilities, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)), Catherine Hyde Townsend (Senior Advisor, Disability Inclusion, Ford Foundation).

Researchers: Mary Wickenden (Research Fellow in Disability and Development Institute of Development Studies, UK), Jacob O. Olusanya (Co-Director and Policy Advisor, Centre for Healthy Start Initiative, Lagos, Nigeria), Augustina Naami (Head Department of Social Work, University of Ghana), Victoria Austin (Associate Professor of Social Justice and Innovation, UCL, Co-Founder and Director, Global Disability Innovation Hub, host of WHO Collaborating Center for AT), Andrew Sentoogo Ssemata (Senior Scientist, Disability Research Group, MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit, Research Fellow, International Center for Evidence in Disability, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK), Sophie Mitra (Professor of Economics at Fordham University and Founder of the Disability Data Initiative).

Youth: Douglas Izuchukwu (Member of the European Union, Youth Sounding Board, Nigeria), Kato Mark Nabimanya (Fieldwork Research Project, Ugandan National Association for the Deafblind), Guaranshi (UNICEF Youth Advocate), Emmanuel (UNICEF Youth Advocate), Taqwa (UNICEF Youth Advocate).

Infants and children, aged 5-14 years, remain anonymous, but are recognized here with deepest thanks.

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